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C O N F I D E N T I A L USEU BRUSSELS 000725

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SUBJECT: EU FOREIGN AND DEFENSE MINISTERS FOCUS ON RUSSIA,
BURMA, IRAN, BOSNIA, PIRACY, AND SRI LANKA

REF: USEU BRUSSELS 702

Classified By: Pol M-C Christopher Davis for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C//NF) Summary: The EU's General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) meetings May 18-19 brought together foreign, defense, and development ministers in a complex choreography of meetings in Brussels. During the meetings, foreign ministers laid plans for the June European Council summit, which will focus on the Lisbon Treaty guarantees to be conveyed to the Irish people, the financial crisis, climate change, and external relations. The external relations portion of the FMs and DefMins meetings on May 18 focused on Russia, Burma, Iran, Bosnia, piracy, and Sri Lanka. FMs discussed the May 21-22 EU-Russia summit, which would include discussion of Georgia, Moldova, Iran, the Middle East, Afghanistan/Pakistan, and Medvedev's European security proposal. GAERC conclusions on Burma contemplated further "restrictive measures," although following the FMs meeting, EU Ambassadors disagreed on how much pressure to apply. The FMs' discussion of Iran failed to move the EU forward on preparation of new sanctions and other measures in support of the dual-track approach. FMs and DefMins approved some planning documents for a transition of the EU's military operation in Bosnia, but did not take a decision to transition yet. FMs and DefMins did not take any decisions about the EU's ongoing counter-piracy operation ATALANTA, although they discussed a late-arriving French non-paper proposing an EU role in training Somali security forces. In addition, FMs condemned the recent fighting in Mogadishu and called for an immediate cessation of hostilities. Conclusions on Sri Lanka centered on calls for an end to the violence and an all-inclusive political process. End Summary.

12. (SBU) The General Affairs meeting of EU foreign ministers on May 18 focused primarily on preparations for the European Council summit in June. FMs agreed that the summit would focus on institutional issues, the financial crisis, climate change, and external relations. Under institutional issues, Heads of State and Government will discuss the guarantees to be given to the Irish people before a second Lisbon Treaty referendum. Speaking to a press conference after the meeting, Czech Minister of European Affairs Stefan Fueller said the Czech Republic understands the importance of these guarantees to the Irish people and has agreed with Irish counterparts to design a "scheme and roadmap" for those guarantees. Meetings will begin the week of May 25 with the

aim of reaching a broad agreement ahead of the European Council meeting. The stated purpose is to allay Irish concerns without reopening ratification in other Member States, and without exceeding the commitments made at the December 2008 European Council. In response to reporters' questions, Czech FM Jan Kohout acknowledged that an announcement of a date for the second Irish referendum would be a positive step, but would be a sovereign decision of the Irish Government. FMs considered a number of topics for the external relations sessions, but did not set an agenda. Notably, the General Affairs conclusions make no reference to a new European Commission President, but rumors in Brussels are that some Member States want to nominate a President in June.

13. (U) The External Relations meetings, which involved FMs, DefMins, and Development ministers in a complex choreography of meetings, included discussion of the EU-Russia summit, Moldova, Sri Lanka, Bosnia, Somalia, the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), Iran, Georgia, Burma, and development cooperation.

14. (C//NF) On Russia, FMs discussed preparations for the May 21-22 EU-Russia summit, which would focus on the global financial crisis and other economic issues. In addition, the EU planned to discuss Georgia, Moldova, Iran, the Middle East, Afghanistan/Pakistan, and Medvedev's European Security proposal. A UK contact told USEU after the GAERC that FMs generally agreed that the EU needs to be up front with the Kremlin about what worries the Member States. Germany, the contact said, argued that Russia has some interesting ideas which need to be considered.

15. (C//NF) The GAERC conclusions on Burma condemn the arrest of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and threaten the reinforcement of the EU's April 2007 "restrictive measures" against Burma (REFTEL). By May 19, EU PSC Ambassadors were already debating these conclusions. During a meeting of Ambassadors, the Czech Presidency reportedly used the term "restrictive measures," but the Commission objected saying the conclusion only called for "measures." The UK's Ambassador reportedly retorted, "Well, we can't possibly mean positive measures." Other Ambassadors speculated about hurting trade opportunities with Burma, which they said could provide more opportunities for China. Multiple contacts told USEU that the EU could use a clear message from Washington on our position on the issue. (Note: The published GAERC conclusions clearly mention "restrictive measures" originally adopted by the EU in April 2007. End Note.)

16. (C//NF) The Foreign Ministers' discussion of Iran failed to move the EU forward on preparation of new sanctions and other measures in support of the dual-track approach. According to a friendly EU Member State contact, High Rep Solana and UK FM Miliband stressed the need to develop further the EU's policy to support U.S. engagement and reinvigorated P5+1 efforts. The other EU+3 countries -- Germany, France, and Italy -- reportedly made no interventions in support of Solana and Miliband on this point, although Italian FM Frattini, evincing some optimism, noted that he would travel to Iran in the near future. Polish FM Sikorski is said to have noted that Iran was 7-8 years away from obtaining a nuclear weapons capability. Picking up on the GAERC's April conclusions on Iran -- which exhorted Iran to seize the "new direction of U.S. policy" to engage seriously with the international community -- the Portuguese FM reportedly said that the U.S. had perhaps not yet done enough, and that it ought to establish diplomatic relations with Iran and North Korea.

17. (C//NF) DefMins and FMs both discussed the EU's Operation ALTHEA in Bosnia, officially approving planning documents for transitioning the mission to a non-executive capacity building and training operation, but without approving the transition itself. High Rep Solana reportedly made a good presentation, saying 5+2 conditionality matters more now than ever and that the EU should not give up the

executive mandate. Solana reportedly said it was prudent to start planning for an eventual reconfiguration of ALTHEA, however, given pressure by contributing countries to draw down. Poland warned that it could not sustain its current commitment, as did Spain. The French DefMin also reportedly expressed France's need to draw down. A UK contact said the EU Military Staff would probably begin looking at force numbers, and would likely decide on a manpower figure between 200 and the current 2,500. He added that it will be important for the U.S. and EU to keep together on this issue.

18. (C//NF) FMs and DefMins did not take any decisions about the EU's ongoing counter-piracy operation ATALANTA, although EU Ambassadors meeting later in the week approved an extension of the operational zone to the Seychelles. Contacts tell us a late-arriving French non-paper proposing an EU role in training Somali security forces was discussed, but without final conclusions. (Note: USEU has forwarded a copy of the French proposal to the Department via email. End Note.) A UK contact told USEU that the EU Council Secretariat would be tasked with looking at the French proposal. According to a contact in the Czech PermRep, the Czech Presidency would like to ensure that future discussions, set to begin in the coming days and weeks, consider not just the French proposal on its own, but a package of potential capacity building measures the EU could undertake to address the root causes of piracy. The contact responded positively to the idea of the U.S. providing suggestions for EU action.

19. (U) FMs, in the official conclusions, condemned the recent fighting in Mogadishu and called for an immediate cessation of hostilities. They also welcomed the leadership of President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and underlined the

importance of continued global coordination within the International Contact Group.

110. (U) On Sri Lanka, FMs regretted the loss of innocent life and called for an all-inclusive political process. Speaking to the press afterward, European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner emphasized the need for the UN to have access to those trapped in IDP camps, saying their basic needs should be provided for. Noting that she was co-chair of the "so-called peace process," she stressed the need for a comprehensive solution. She also noted that the Commission had committed 3 million euros to the ICRC as the only body that has full access to Sri Lanka.

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